

## **Planning for Gender-Affirming Surgery? Steps to Consider**

There are a number of surgical options that are available to help your body look and act in greater alignment with your identity. If you are considering a type of surgery, here are a few steps to get you started. Some of these steps can be done in a different order or at the same time! You can also check out our [handout "Questions to Consider Asking for Any Procedure"](#) for specific ideas at each step.

### **1. Do your own research about the surgery.**

Check out our resource lists for the surgery you are thinking about and research the surgery a little bit yourself. You will want to have a good understanding of the options for the surgery you are seeking, what outcomes to expect with the surgery, as well as what *not* to expect with the surgery. For some surgeries, like vaginoplasty, there are a variety of surgical techniques that can be used. Educate yourself on the options as well as the risks and benefits of each one.

### **2. Research providers or surgeons you may want to work with.**

Look to our resource lists for surgeon names and locations. Different types of providers do different kinds of surgeries. For example, you can see a gynecologist for a hysterectomy. For an orchiectomy, you can see a urologist. For breast augmentation or chest surgery, you can see a breast surgeon or a plastic surgeon. Different types of 'bottom surgery' will often be done by a plastic surgeon. Plastic surgeons also do facial feminization, tracheal shaves, and body contouring procedures.

Some providers and surgeons primarily or exclusively do gender-affirming surgeries. Others provide general services but may have a track record working with trans communities.

It is important to find a surgeon that meets your needs. Exploring several options can be really helpful. Ask community members and your health care providers for recommendations. Read the reviews written by past patients. Check out the surgeon's website and any other public information. Speak with their office to get a feel for the practice and learn about their intake procedures. Your experience in the consult will also help you decide if you want to work with this surgeon and practice. Consider scheduling consults with more than one provider. Perhaps bring a friend, family member or other support person with you to the consult.

We strive to keep resource lists of providers for different types of surgeries. Please feel free to call us if you have any questions or feedback about anyone on our resource lists or anyone you may be working with.

### 3. Schedule a consultation.

The consultation is the time for you to get the information you need to be sure you are making an informed decision about the procedure and about working with this particular surgeon. Before calling anywhere please check out our [“Questions to consider asking for any procedure”](#) form to have resources to ask some questions. If you are ready, set up multiple consultations. Get a feel for who you like and trust. You should be clear about the techniques the surgeon will use which may be based on best practices and research, your body and your goals. You will want to be informed about the risks, possible complications, benefits and what outcomes to expect with the procedure. Ask the surgeon for data or references about their services. Find out if the surgeon has any written information to help guide you in this process.

You will want to find out the expected timeline for the surgery and any requirements to be completed beforehand. Every surgeon has their own policies, pre and post operative plans and guidelines. This will likely include, at minimum, getting a **pre-op physical**. Helpful Tip: be mindful when scheduling your pre-op physical, labs, EKGs and other procedures. Don't wait until the last minute, you want to make sure you will be seen and these may take days to process. The surgeon will cancel your surgery without them. You may need to get a seasonal infection/virus/disease test the week prior as well, such as: COVID and FLU. Any health concerns that make it less safe for you to undergo surgery will need to be addressed. Depending on the type of surgery, you may need hair removal services to prepare the body area. The surgeon may have other recommendations about how to prepare yourself physically for the procedure.

You will most likely need letters from health care providers or mental health care providers. In some cases, you will need a letter simply outlining the care you are receiving and recommending that the desired surgery is an appropriate part of your care plan. Often you will need one or two letters from a **qualified mental health professional** that state that you have gender dysphoria. You may need these letters for the surgeon and/or for your insurance plan. It is often acceptable for one of the letters to come from a health care provider who is involved in your hormone therapy. *Be sure to clarify with the surgeon what types of letters are needed, how many, and what type of providers can provide the letters.*

At this stage, it is helpful to gather information about what to expect in terms of a recovery process as you may need to plan ahead for time off work and extra support during that time.

You usually walk out the office after your consultation with a folder or booklet of information.

### 4. Figure out how you are going to pay for the surgery.

**If you have insurance:** Ask your insurance company which services are covered under their transgender care policies or general policies in your insurance plan. You will also want to find out if the surgeon you want to see and the specific location of their practice is part of your insurance network. In general, your insurance company may have better coverage if you see a provider that is ‘in network’. They may cover care partially if you see a provider that is ‘out of network,’ especially if their plan does not offer any local ‘in network’ options. If other types of healthcare are needed in order to have the surgery, such as electrolysis prior to vaginoplasty or facial feminization surgery, ask your insurance company if those services are covered as well. Insurance can be tricky. Be prepared for long wait times on the phone and confusing answers. Check out our [“Questions to consider asking for any procedure”](#) handout for some

ideas of questions to ask. Your insurance company may have a health insurance advocate. Ask if they have one and work with that person to understand your insurance coverage and requirements.

**If you have an HMO plan**, talk to your Primary Care Provider (PCP) about getting a referral to the surgeon. Also, ask your PCP if there is anyone “In-Network” who provides this service that they recommend.

Your surgery may not be covered, there may be long extra steps to take to get it accepted. Keep at it and keep pushing for what you deserve. Do not forget, you are not alone and ask for help if you need any.

If you have selected your surgeon, and if they accept your insurance, the surgeon’s office will send all the information to the insurance company to seek approval for surgery. You may get approved or denied; even if they say they cover it, there may be extra steps you have to do.

**If you do not have insurance:** Please check out our resource lists for organizations that can help you financially for surgery. There are organizations that can help you with grants or donations as well as credit cards designed to pay for plastic surgery. Just be careful and pay attention to all the fine print!!

## **5. Finalize your plan and get ready for surgery.**

Once your insurance coverage has been approved or your self-pay plan has been set, you are ready to select your date for surgery. You usually have to pay a reservation fee when scheduling. You can also at this time request an appointment with your surgeon to ask some final questions. At this stage be sure to know what to expect for recovery and how to plan for it.

As surgery comes up, you most likely will get asked to pay your remaining balance. If using insurance, this will be the amount after your insurance plan says how much they will cover for the surgery, and this will include things like: co-insurance, deductible, and any other out-of-pocket costs. If you are not using insurance for the procedure, you may be asked to pay the remaining balance prior to surgery for the costs of the surgeon, the hospital, and the anesthesiologist before you have surgery.

We also recommend that if a surgeon is recommending that you stop any of your prescribed medication that you check in with your provider of those medications to make sure it is safe for you to discontinue that medication for the recommended time.

Spend some time planning about how to get through the recovery process and support your healing. Will you have someone available to stay with you once discharged from the hospital? If you are getting your surgery done out of town, will you have a place to stay until you can travel home? **Set a plan to take care of your daily needs like meals, clothing, laundry, doing house chores, and getting medication.** If you need help thinking through this, ask CWHC for referrals on organizations that specialize in recovery planning.

If you have any questions please feel free to give us a call at (773) 935-6126. We hope you feel: well informed, confident in your surgical decision, and most of all happy and healthy.